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ABSTRACT

Currently, America's racial and ethnic minorities are under-represented in higher education and in almost all occupational fields that require a college education. To investigate the extent to which black females in higher education administration view race as a mediating factor in their career progression, 39 black female administrators in predominantly white institutions were interviewed. An analysis of the results showed that the majority of the women interviewed exhibited a high degree of career or occupational mobility which they overwhelmingly attributed to their long term commitment to a career in academe and to their conscious conceptualization of plans to accomplish their goals. Most of these women indicated a high degree of self-confidence and assurance. These women's career planning and strategies to attain top-level administrative positions included: utilizing on-the-job training; consciously working themselves up through the ranks; paying early attention to educational preparation in areas relevant to positions of leadership; taking advantage of management training; developing and strengthening various personal characteristics conducive to successful leadership, especially "self-confidence"; and seeking the counsel and advice of mentors. These findings support a model of career management for black women, which focuses on five major factors: Attitude, Image, Competence, Career Mapping, and Contacts (AICCC). (BL)

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THE AICCC PERSPECTIVE OF CAREER MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY FOR PERSONAL AND POSITIONAL POWER FOR BLACK WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

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The AICCC Perspective of Career Management: A Strategy For Personal and Positional Power For Black Women in Higher Education Administration

Currently America's racial and ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented in higher education and in almost all occupational fields that require a college education (Astin, 1982).

In the latter part of the 1970's, a period marked by an alledged heightened sensitivity to sex discrimination and social reform, some segments of American society slowly began to recognize that many women and minorities were qualified to assume administrative responsibilities in higher education. While some progress has been made as a result of anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action programs and the raised consciousness of women and minorities, that progress is less than encouraging when comparisons are made across race and gender. Black women, for example, are more underrepresented than any other group in leadership positions, especially in positions which can ultimately lead to presidential appointments (Woods-Fouche, 1982). This scarcity of professional Black women in higher education administration is compatible with their general low status in American society.

According to recent statistics, in 1981 there were only 22 minority women presidents of higher education institutions, less than half (10) of whom were Black. Black women administrators at the assistant, associate, director, dean, vice president or presidential level totaled only 350 during

that year. The majority of Black females in higher education administration are concentrated in lower level administrative positions where they "carry out policy" as opposed to "formulating policy". They are generally the "assistant to" serving as "acting coordinators" or "coordinators", or "assistants to" a major decision maker who is usually white and male. Relatively few Black women have made it to the top in terms of holding the highest administrative positions in our colleges and universities (Smith, 1982). Nonetheless, such conditions have not totally discouraged Black women from pursuing high level career goals. Black women continue to seek avenues for raising their level of employment opportunities just as Black men and white women have done (Woods-Fouche, 1982).

However, Black women who aspire to top administrative positions in the university face a number of impediments that make it difficult for them to achieve at the highest professional levels. While issues of survival and advancement in American society are a never ending burden and challenge for Blacks in general the "double whammy", as its been called, of sexual and racial discrimination that Black women face, is a formidable deterrent. It especially prevents Black women from benefitting from formal networks such as higher education training, and informal networks in which social relationships could possibly generate career benefits.

Several writers (Arce, 1976; Brown and Stent, 1977; Olivas, 1978; de los Santos, 1980; Astin, 1982) have looked at the American educational system as a kind of pipeline which ultimately leads to positions of

leadership and influence in our society. Conceptualized in this manner, five major leakage points (completion of high school, entry to college, completion of college, entry to graduate or professional schools, and completion of graduate or professional school) are identified at which a disproportionately large number of minority group members drop out. Confounded with these leakages is the fact that those Black women who do enter and complete college are heavily concentrated in traditionally defined female and black majors. According to the literature these patterns tend to limit Black women's access to high level positions and occupations.

In addition, according to recent research there is a significant link between early career aspirations and plans and education and career development. Astin (1982), for example, found that early career plans and aspirations have considerable impact on the long-term career development and attainments of minorities. Findings such as these suggest that Black women could benefit from career mapping or planning which would necessarily involve early identification of career goals and a conscious movement away from traditionally defined black and female occupations into those which prepare them for leadership and high status.

Especially important to career advancement is the informal networks that traditionally function to facilitate career movement. It is in this area that the double bind of race and sex has its most crippling effect for career oriented Black women. The value of a mentor in career building and career mobility has been noted throughout the literature. Men, especially

white men, commonly have access to a mentor and career advancement appears to be directly related to such informal networks. Few Black women, however, have access to a mentor, especially one that is also Black and female, and it is rare for a man (Black or white) to choose a female protege (Smith, 1982). To the extent that Black women in high level administrative positions have a mentor, most often it is someone in their family and only occasionally a colleague or other professional. In view of such constraints it appears that those Black women who will "make-it" in academe will have to use specific strategies for coping and advancing career goals in an environment that is not quite like any other environment.

Recent research indicates that there are several important factors which should be considered in career management strategies. These include, first and foremost, a knowledge and understanding of the organizational culture. At the very least this includes knowledge of the decision-making process; knowledge of the sources of power--actual or potential--and the effective utilization of those sources of power; and knowledge of the various political constraints and how they operate against the advancement of women. Additionally, successful career strategies for Black women, particularly those in higher education administration, must also pay attention to educational preparation and training for leadership jobs; Black women's often very rich experiential background; as well as a willingness to take risks; and the development of a strong positive self-image (Alexander-Hughes, 1981).

Accepting the premise that access to higher level administrative positions in academe, or any professional setting, is enhanced by career planning and higher education attainment; the present study focuses on the strategies and behavioral factors that lead to career mobility and success for Black women.

Purpose and Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which Black women in higher education administration view race as a mediating factor in their career progression. The focus of this study evolved from earlier research (Alexander-Hughes, 1981) in which Black female subjects reported that: Because of the mediating effect of race, Black women have to necessarily strive harder than white women in order to accomplish their career goals, especially in predominantly white work environments such as the university. Based upon this observation, in 1982, the investigators decided to ascertain the extent to which other Black women in higher education administration share this view.

The objective of this investigation was twofold: (1) to collect and codify the reported behaviors and strategies that Black women in higher education administration employ to deal with various constraints, especially racism, to their personal and career success, and (2) to derive from this codification a career management model or strategy for Black women administrators.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the subjects to determine

the impact, if any, of racial constraints upon their career aspirations, and strategies they used for career mobility and success. Specifically, interview questions were designed and analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. How or to what extent has race been a militating factor in the career progression of these Black women administrators generally and in predominantly white work environments specifically?

2. What coping strategies do these women use to resolve conflicts between their career goals and various organizational constraints, especially racism?

3. What are these women's attitudes concerning role perceptions and appropriate work-related behaviors?

4. What personal characteristics for administrative leadership do these Black women administrators possess?

5. To what extent has mentor or advisor relationships facilitated these women's career attainments?

Utilizing open-ended questions allowed responses to be analyzed, classified and summarized by the "dominant theme" of the subjects' career strategies. This process was essential to the formulation of a model career management strategy.

The sample was composed of thirty-nine Black female administrators in predominantly white higher education institutions. Their ages ranged from 27 to 52 years, their years of experience in higher education administration, from 1 to 14. The majority (34) of the women were

employed in four-year public institutions of higher education while five worked in community or junior colleges. Twenty-seven of these women had a doctorate degree.

Findings

The majority (38) of the women in this study recounted varying experiences in which racism as well as sexism posed threats to their career progression. Only one women reported that racism had never been an impediment to her personal or career goals. Generally, the responses indicated that those women who had encountered racism as an obstacle in their career paths, ascended to leadership roles in predominantly white work environments primarily as a result of strategic career planning which included developing a positive mind-set about self, the work environment, and developing and utilizing support systems with other Blacks within and outside the institution. These support systems usually provided opportunities for these women to air their frustrations by talking-through various potentially volatile encounters with racism as well as sexism. Many of the women interviewed reported that they had to learn to manage racism in much the same way as they learned to manage other feats in their lives. The following remarks on racism and sexism by one of the respondents is typical of these women's views:

> I had to learn to see racism and sexism for what they were -- negative aspects of society that are perpectuated by people with fears and narrow perspectives toward life and other

people. When I truely accepted this as fact, I learned to "positively" attack racism. That is, I rose above and resisted the desire to expend valuable energy reacting to every racist or sexist remark directed toward me; I decided when and how to respond to racism ...

Several of the women reported learning to deal with racism through trial and error, when something worked they would remember to use it again, others reported learning to work through the system and around it, once they understood it. For example, one woman said:

I learned and studied the politics of the power structure and became adept at identifying politically motivated behaviors and those based solely on race or sex, then I learned how to work around them ...

Analysis of the data indicated that all of the respondents, except one had made long-term commitments to careers in academe and had consciously conceptualized plans or strategies to accomplish their goals. Fifteen of these women had aspirations for the presidency; six for various vice-presidential positions; eight for the provost position; six for deanships; and three for governing board positions. The one woman who had no long-term commitment to her career reported that since her husband was also in academic administration, his career was more important to the family than hers.

Relative to the questions of what coping strategies the women in this study used to resolve conflicts between their career goals and various organizational constraints, thirty-eight of the women reported

that resolution of conflicts, whether they were internal or external, hinged upon developing a positive attitude about themselves and the situation itself. One woman commented:

> Despite what others say or do, my real adversary is my own attitude or negative reaction to what's said to me or how others behave toward me. I have the powers, within me, to choose my reaction to any and all situations. How I choose to react depends upon the attitude I hold about myself, other people and human behavior. My attitude is a reflection of my inner character and I want that character to be positive.

Other responses can be categorized in terms of these women focusing their time and energies on the following:

-learning and understanding the organizational culture -- what behaviors and practices are acceptable and unacceptable -- and conforming to these standards

-developing impeccable interpersonal and technical skills

-learning what standards of performance their bosses expect of them and realizing those expectations

-developing and nurturing their own self-confidence

-developing cadres of supporters within their departments and the university

-attaining their career and personal goals

Self-confidence was the item most frequently cited by these women as the key to their personal and career success. All of the women believed that their self-confidence helped them develop broad visions about

themselves as individuals and their capacity to succeed in their careers. The following response was typical of how these women linked their personal and career success:

> I had to believe I could succeed despite the odds against me ... Once my self-confidence and inner support were established, I began formulating my goals and working to achieve them. Before then, I would just accept whatever came my way and considered myself lucky ...

Data on the subjects' perceptions of roles and work related behaviors revealed that these Black women administrators were primarily concerned with two factors: (1) their interpersonal style, and (2) their image as a Black first and a female administrator second. One woman recounted what she termed a near "fiasco" in her career as a result of her trying to "prove her competence to her white counterparts and boss at the expense of her health and "human skills" -- working effectively with and through other people:

> Doing a good job is not always enough, interpersonal skills are equally important. I had to recognize and understand that white people readily evaluate Blacks in general and women in particular on their interpersonal style, competencies included. No matter how competent I tried to be, because I kept to myself, doing my work, the whites around me still perceived me as having a chip on my shoulder, which translated into an attitudinal problem. So, I was not regarded as a member of the team... What I eventually learned was that

> irrespective of whether or not I had the "proverbial chip on my shoulder", because I was reluctant or seemingly uncomfortable interracting with the whites in my department, I was assessed as having problems getting along with others.

The narratives of the women in this study also indicated that their career aspirations reflected an inner character that was either innate to their personalities or learned. Several respondents reported that their style of dress and overall demeanor evolved as a result of observing other professionals (women and men) within and outside their work environments, and reading various books about dressing for success. Twelve of the women reported learning how to mentally project onto others how they wanted to be perceived as a Black women and as an administrator. One woman said:

> I had to learn how to program in my mind the type image I wanted to project to others. This image had to be reflective of my personality and leadership capabilities. I learned to project this image of m[illegible]f in the way I dressed and interracted with people. I told myself, mentally and verbally, that I was a leader, in control, assertive and confident, and that I could take on any challenge. With practice this image became automatic and a real personality projection.

Other women in this study reported that grooming and nurturing their image as a Black woman administrator included:

-flexibility and consistency in behaviors -- being fair and consistent in how they dealt with others, and allowing their sense of justice to guide their decisions and behaviors.

-attention to the nonverbal messages conveyed by body language -- being cautious about eye contact, body position, posture, tone of voice, and so on.

-learning to emulate the positive behaviors of people who wielded power and influence. In this respect, one respondent commented:

> Some people have problems with this ... Emulating the behaviors of others does not mean you are losing your identity by trying to act like another person, rather it means learning to practice and perfect behaviors that generate support and loyalty from others, and which are capable of commanding the attention of others -- your boss and subordinates.

-developing a style of dress that is appropriate for your position or status.

> One woman's comments on the style of dress for the successful woman administrator subsumed those of several of the other women in this study:
>
> My career goals and success as a Black woman cannot be hampered by the way I look or dress. At work, I dress to make a statement about myself and capabilities as a leader and to make a positive impact on my superiors and colleagues, not to express my personal taste in clothes ...

Other women indicated that while there was no formal dress code, per se, at their university, there did seem to be an informal one. Regarding such an "unspoken" dress code, one woman reported:

> My style of dress is consistent with the unspoken dress code promulgated by top administrators. They don't dress casually

and neither do I ...

Data relative to the personal characteristics of successful Black administrators were varied and are reported by frequency of occurrence:

Characteristics	Frequency of Occurrence
-Unwaning self-determination	39
-Being willing to dream and share those dreams with people who can turn them into reality	39
-Be willing to take risks	39
-Viewing what you do with your life and work as a career and not just another job	37
-Strong support systems from family, friends and contacts	30
-Personal charisma	27
-Always ready to revamp when things fall apart, or you can't do what you feel you need to do in life or on your job	27
-Always view your work and life experiences as preparation or a stepping stone to the next experience in your life or career	20
-Be mobile and willing to relocate, if necessary	20
-Be a planner and organizer, make things happen for yourself	18
-Capable of selling yourself and abilities to others	18

Characteristics	Frequency of Occurrence
-Innovative and creative with your life and career	17
-Having the "right" attitude about yourself and an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses	15
-Capable of sizing-up people and situations	13
-Involve yourself with other women and people who are going someplace and doing productive things with their lives	12

Addressing the issue of innovativeness and creativity in her career progression, one woman indicated that:

> Black women can't always follow the traditional route men use to move up and through the academic hierarchy, so they have to develop alternative strategies (just in case...). Sometimes they will have to take a "detour" in their career progression in order to gain needed experiences and skills. I took a few detours on the way to my current position. For several years I worked in the private sector in order to gain the supervisory and budget management skills I needed because I knew I wasn't going to get them in my present role. This detour did not deter me from my original goal, I knew I wanted to be in higher education; it helped me realize my goal and gain skills that the university never afforded me during that stage of my career. Now I'm back because my reputation in the private sector brought me back, with added credentials to boot.

Finally, with respect to the influence of mentor or advisor relationships on their career attainments, all thirty-nine women reported some "significant other person" as contributing to their personal or career development. This "significant other" was typically either their minister, mother, another Black professional woman or man, or someone they identified with vicariously through the media or through indirect association. They viewed "significant others" as people who contributed to their lives and career by helping them do what they wanted to do, or do what they were doing better. These individuals, it was reported, provided support and stimulation and assisted them in establishing contacts with other people who helped them in a variety of ways. Although at least half of these women knew what they wanted from their careers, the same number reported that some "significant other" was responsible for them having the position they currently hold.

Several (10) of the women stressed how important it is for Black women administrators to have supporters and contacts with people who have power and influence. As one respondent commented:

> Contacts have more influence sometimes than a good resume or interview. In this college, administrators value a good word about an individual from someone they know more than expertise and experience. When I was interviewed for this position, I knew one of the white female candidates had more experience and training for this position than I, but the hiring agent didn't know her. I got the job because significant people put in a good word about my interpersonal and technical skills.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of this study was that all of the participants reported having career aspirations and goals and having formulated specific strategies for advancing those goals.

DISCUSSION

This study has many dimensions, the most important of which is the development of a model of career management for Black women based upon the strategies reported by occupationally successful Black women in higher education administration.

In general, the findings of this study are consistent with the literature on women administrators and managers which reports that:

1. women who make it to the top of the professional hierarchy of management are unique, and can contribute much to the professions they represent because they are a valuable untapped resource; and
2. such women begin early to formulate career aspirations and goals and then map out various strategies (sometimes based on trial and error) for success.

More specifically, the majority of the women interviewed in this study exhibited a high degree of career or occupational mobility which they overwhelmingly attributed to their long-term commitment to a career in academe and their conscious conceptualization of plans to accomplish their goals. Most of these women indicated a high degree of self-confidence and assurance as they reported that they had "no doubts" about accomplishing their ultimate career goals. Most notably, these women's career planning and strategies to attain top-level administrative positions included: utlizing on-the-job training;

consciously working themselves up through the ranks; paying early attention to educational preparation in areas relevant to positions of leadership; taking advantage of management training; developing and strengthening various personal characteristics conducive to successful leadership, especially "self-confidence"; and seeking the counsel and advice of mentors.

Recognizing that Black women cannot always follow the traditional route to the top of the administrative hierarchy, the women in this study stressed that not only is it important to develop or follow a career strategy but it is equally important for Black women administrators to be flexible and develop alternative plans or strategies as well.

Among the various characteristics enunciated as traits they possess and which are important traits for the mobile female administrator -- besides a strong self image and self confidence -- respondents identified "a strong motivation to manage" and a "sensitivity to and/or concern for people". Many of the women reported paying particular attention to their work related behaviors and their professional image as also being a part of their career strategy. In this respect, most of the women reported being primarily concerned with their interpersonal style of communicating and their image as a Black first and a female administrator secondly. Factors such as style of dress and overall demeanor were also considered by these women to be important considerations in any career plan for success.

According to the women in this study, mentor relationships have been critical in their career development. All of the women recounted one or

more persons who encouraged, challenged and supported them in decisions relevant to their careers. Traditionally, mentor relationships have been an important key to occupational mobility for males, especially white males and more recently, to some extent, for white females as well. However, Black women have usually had limited access to mentors. To the extent that they have had mentors they have not been the traditional ones such as colleagues. Rather they have been family members, ministers and only occasionally colleagues. Consistent with the literature, the women in this study typically identified their mother or minister as a mentor and only occasionally another Black professional woman or man and rarely a white professional or colleague (male or female).

Finally, the respondents considered both race and sex discrimination to be salient factors in their professional experiences. Contemplating the impact of these factors upon their own career mobility, they reported a variety of ways in which they attempted to cope with racism and sexism ranging from "trial and error", to developing and utilizing support systems within and outside the work setting, to consciously and systematically studying the politics of the organizational power structure such that they were able to identify and deal with behaviors and decisions based solely upon race and/or sex.

From these findings, the authors developed a model of career management for Black women which focuses on five major factors: attitude, image, competence, career mapping and contacts; hence the AICCC Perspective of career management. Based upon the experiences reported by the women in

this study these five factors, when taken collectively, form the basis for an action-oriented career management strategy that fosters personal/positional development and career development simultaneously.

While the authors do not propose that the AICCC perspective of career management will provide any miraculous career "quick-fixes" for Black women in higher education administration, the development and refinement of an AICCC mind-set has proven effective in helping the Black women in this study realize positional and personal success, and visibility in their careers under debilitating constraints such as sexism and racism. It provides a means of managing within a system that, in most instances, oppose Black women's existence on the one hand, and the rights accorded that existence on the other. Until this system changes, Black women who succeed in higher education administration will do so by conforming to its organizational culture, and by developing and nurturing a productive attitude and associated behaviors; a circumspect image (demeanor and dress); competence (technical and interpersonal) in their profession; developing clearly outlined career paths to follow; and generating and utilizing people contacts within and outside the institution. Once there are sufficient numbers of women in general and Black women in particular in decision making positions in academe, then change in institutional norms and hiring and promotion decisions will not only be possible, but inevitable.

Until this happens, Black women who have penetrated the administrative hierarchy of academe must develop networks and means of sharing their successes as well as failures with one another, in order for others to

learn to emulate and applaud their successes and avoid their failures; both of which are essential to career progression and success and emotional well-being.

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